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His class knows the difference

"The record of Stalin's policy of appeasement toward Hitler — both the open and the secret record — reveal that the more aggressive Hitler's policies became, the more Stalin pressed his courtship. And the more strenuously Stalin wooed him, the bolder were Hitler's aggressions."

So wrote the man who knew Stalin from the inside. He was Maj. Gen. Walter G. Krivitsky, the first high-ranking Stalin secret police agent to defect to the West almost half-a-century ago. He wrote a book, "In Stalin's Secret Service," (Harper's, 1939), which tragically was ignored by Western policy-makers. (In 1941, Krivitsky was found dead in his Washington hotel room. He was pronounced a suicide, although he had told friends that if he were ever found dead it would not be by his own hands.)

Krivitsky, who had directed Soviet spy networks in Western Europe, provided lots of information about Soviet implantation of spies in the British Foreign Office. Little attention was given to his information. No attention at all was paid to his insights about Stalin, who despite his "non-aggression pact" with Hitler, found himself at war with the Hitler he had wooed so assiduously and so obsequiously.

Krivitsky's experience has been the story of many Soviet informants who have tried to alert the democracies to what Stalinism and post-Stalinism meant. It is far too discomforting to heed such warnings from people who have seen with their own eyes what the Soviet Union is like, warnings from people who have lived and emerged from the belly of the dragon.

Yet it is not such a far cry from Krivitsky's discounted warnings to a recent article in *The New York Times Magazine*, titled "The New Wave From Russia." The author, Professor Louis Menashe, teaches a course called History of the Soviet Union at the Polytechnic Institute of New York. It is a report about his class, in which there is group of young people, mostly Jewish, recent emigres from the Soviet Union. While the article is written in a quasi-wistful style that borders on the condescending, it is quite clear

that Professor Menashe simply will not believe what these young ex-Soviet citizens tell him about the realities of Soviet socialism in modern urban Russia. After all, how could he accept their testimony when, as he tells us, most of these ex-Russians cheered President Reagan's election and re-election?

I think to myself:

Imagine that this is 1938 and an earlier Professor Menashe is teaching a course called History of Nazi Germany to a class, among whom are a group of young Jewish refugees from the Third Reich. Is it conceivable that a professor would ignore the personal testimony of these emigres and mutter that "National Socialism" can't be all bad because, after all, the Third Reich does have a socialist content?

There is something pathetic in Professor Menashe's first-person report about his Russian Jewish students when he describes their attitude, one that "carries an authority that is difficult to deny." He writes:

"I have to summon all my eloquence to demonstrate that the Soviet Union is a product of a harsh, traumatic history and deserves some balanced as well as critical understanding. Also, I argue, socialism as a system of economic organization must not be judged by the Soviet version or it. That, roughly, is the credo I bring to my class."

Some time ago I wrote an article in the *Wall Street Journal* about the infiltration of Marxist propaganda, disguised as scholarship, into the contemporary university classroom. Here, in Professor Menashe's own words, one has documentation for what I was writing about. If Professor Menashe's credo 67 years after the Bolshevik revolution is that there is a version of "socialism as a system of economic organization" which is superior to that of the Soviet version, where could that be — Cuba, China, Yugoslavia, Soviet Eastern Europe, Albania, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, Yemen? Erewhon? How shall we judge their socialism compared to the Soviet version? One of Professor Menashe's Russian emigre students offers what he calls a better definition of socialism — "Socialism means a shortage of sand in the desert."

Professor Menashe's words raise

a serious question. Is it the duty, let alone the right, of a historian to "teach" a "credo" — his credo? Even if his credo encompasses a belief in apartheid, or that the Holocaust is a historical fraud? And what does Professor Menashe's socialist apologetics mean when he tells his students that the Soviet Union, as a product of "a harsh, traumatic history ... deserves some balanced as well as critical understanding." Did Hitler's Germany also deserve "balanced as well as critical understanding"? Does South Africa today, which like most countries is "a product of a harsh, traumatic history" also deserve balanced as well as critical understanding, whatever these terms can mean? And when the "balanced as well as critical understanding" about the USSR is achieved, what then? Will we "understand" KAL 007? Major Nicholson? Sakharov? Schsharansky?

How can Professor Menashe, himself a Jew, stand facing these young Jewish men and women and tell them that the Soviet Union deserves "balanced and critical understanding," a socialist country that made life so unbearable for them and their families in the Soviet Union that they had to flee to capitalist America seeking a new and better life? And even if Professor Menashe weren't a Jew, wouldn't such conduct be equally contemptible? Shouldn't Professor Menashe, as he faces those Russian Jewish emigres, say if only to himself with a little humility, "There but for the grace of God ..."

The intellectual arrogance of Professor Menashe is to be seen when one of the Russian students in his class, Roman Litvak, has the gall, the audacity to say, according to the professor, that "in their essence, fascism and communism are alike!"

Professor Menashe expostulates: "Hold on, one thing at a time, Roman. Fascism and communism are different in their [essence]. They are not alike in theory or in ideals."

What an example of professional ignorance! Not only does fascism lack a theory, it even lacks a definition. (Of course, there's the Soviet definition: "Fascism, a bourgeois movement and regime typical of the era of imperialism.") Scholars who

have studied fascism have agreed over and over again that, unless one relates fascism to communism, fascism as a political phenomenon cannot be understood. Fascism's origins are probably Marxist-Leninist. How much wiser, then, is Roman Litvak, the student, than his putative teacher. And how much wiser, still, is another student, Sasha Lekhtman, whom Professor Menashe calls (you can be sure not as a compliment) "the resident voice of Solzhenitsyn," when he tells his teacher that Stalin was worse than Hitler because while Hitler victimized others, Stalin slaughtered his own people, 40 million, 50 million, 60 million, who knows?

It is sad and also frightening, to say the least, that living witnesses from an empire that has become the most powerful and most insatiable dictatorship in the history of mankind can be ridiculed in so paternally superior a fashion by this foolish professor who still sees a moral difference between Stalin and Hitler, between Nazi Germany and, yes, Gorbachev's Soviet Union.

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